

# Child Protective Services:

**STRONG  
FAMILIES  
AND SAFE  
CHILDREN**



## STRONG FAMILIES AND SAFE CHILDREN

Parenting is both a privilege and a challenge. Parents have the responsibility and right to:

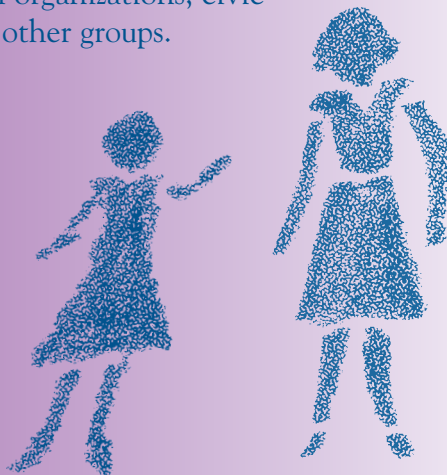
- raise and nurture their children
- guide and discipline them
- make decisions concerning their children's health, safety, and well-being.

Children have the need and right to:

- be nurtured
- live safely in their homes.

Sometimes the stress of daily life combined with the responsibilities of parenting can be overwhelming. Some parents unintentionally respond with physical abuse or neglect of their children's developmental needs.

Parents can be helped to regain control, effectively nurture their children, and ensure their children's health and safety through services offered by the community, faith organizations, civic and other groups.



## WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

Each year in Virginia, over 42,000 children are reported to local social services departments for suspected child abuse or neglect. Local social services departments are required by law to respond to valid reports of suspected child maltreatment and assist families in keeping their children safe.

Virginia law defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 whose parent or other person responsible for the child's care:

- Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury
- Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care
- Abandons the child
- Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development
- Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

Infants who have a medical diagnosis or finding of exposure to non-prescription drugs or alcohol during pregnancy are also considered to be at risk of harm. Attending physicians are required to report these cases to local social services departments.

## WHAT TYPE OF SERVICES

### CAN I EXPECT TO RECEIVE?

Local social services departments have two ways of responding to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect under Virginia law. The goals of both responses are to:

- assess child safety
- strengthen and support families
- prevent the (re)occurrence of child maltreatment.

#### Investigation Response

A child abuse or neglect investigation is conducted when there are immediate child safety concerns or the report is required by law to be investigated.

#### Family Assessment Response

A child safety and family needs assessment is conducted with the family when:

- the report meets the legal definition of child abuse or neglect but is not required by law to be investigated
- there is no immediate threat to the child(ren)'s safety or well-being
- the family may need services.

Reports initially determined to be appropriate for a Family Assessment may be reconsidered for an Investigation if there is evidence of serious abuse or neglect or child safety concerns.

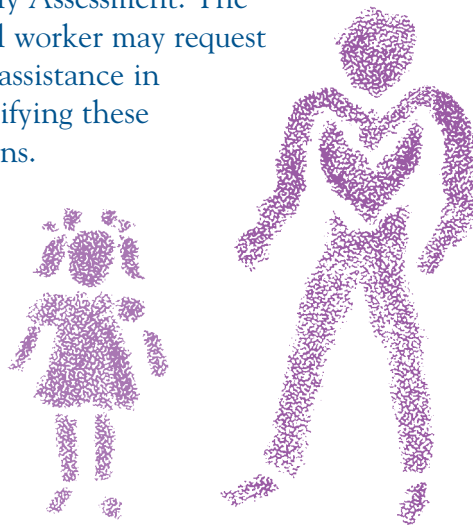
The report concerning your family or a child in your care has been determined to be appropriate for a Family Assessment Response.

## COMPLETING A FAMILY ASSESSMENT

A child protective services social worker is requesting to meet with you to help you evaluate child safety and related needs within your family. The intent of child protective services is to be responsive to your family's needs and to support you in providing for the safety, health, and well-being of your child or children in your care.

In most cases, the child protective services social worker and family collaborate in completing a child safety and family needs assessment. Meeting with the social worker provides an opportunity for you to share your perspectives on your child(ren), identify family needs, ask questions, and obtain feedback.

The social worker may also talk with other family members including your child(ren) and other persons or professionals having knowledge of your child(ren) as part of a comprehensive Family Assessment. The social worker may request your assistance in identifying these persons.



## Why Has The Local Social Services Department Contacted Me?

You have been contacted because the department of social services has received a request for services on behalf of your child(ren) or a child in your care due to a report of suspected abuse or neglect. The report is about:

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(CHILD OR CHILDREN)

The concerns are:

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Please call:

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(SOCIAL WORKER)

at 

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(AGENCY PHONE)

to discuss the report and your family's need  
for services.

If you do not wish to participate in a Family Assessment, the social worker will proceed with conducting a child safety assessment as required by Virginia law. He/she will provide you with written feedback concerning your child(ren)'s safety and related needs including recommended services.

If you need or desire services for your family, the social worker will offer to:

- develop a service plan with you
- link you to available community resources such as family counseling, parent support groups, substance abuse services, children's programs, day care, etc.

You may also decline services for your family that are offered as a result of the Family Assessment. In this instance, the case will be closed if there is no threat to your child(ren)'s health or safety.

If your child(ren)'s health or safety is compromised, the child protective services social worker may consider petitioning the court to require needed services on behalf of your child(ren).



## TOOLS FOR STRONG FAMILIES

### Self care for Parents/Caretakers

When parents take time to care for themselves, they are better able to manage the challenges of parenting. Learn to recognize signs of stress and take time out to replenish yourself. You may wish to:

- Find a sitter you can trust to give you time for adult interests and relationships
- Relieve stress by taking a walk, reading, or pursuing a hobby
- Visit or talk with friends or relatives
- Talk with other parents
- Join a community activity or group.

### Ways to show your children that you care

- Notice them
- Ask them about themselves
- Play with them
- Read aloud together
- Hug them
- Suggest better behaviors when they act out
- Praise more
- Criticize less.

**Child Abuse Hotline**  
**1-800-552-7096**



032-01-034 (4/01)